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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAMA 001524

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SUBJECT: SCENESSETTER FOR SECRETARY RUMSFELD'S VISIT TO
BAHRAIN OCTOBER 9-10

Classified by Charge d'Affaires Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (S) Mr. Secretary, we warmly welcome you to Bahrain. While the genesis of your trip is meeting with Operation Iraqi Freedom coalition Ministers of Defense on the aircraft carrier John F. Kennedy, your visit comes at an important time in our bilateral relationship with Bahrain. The mil-mil relationship spanning some 50 years experienced a rare hiccup last summer when the U.S. grew concerned about Bahraini resolve in pursuing a small group of dangerous terrorist suspects. Bahrainis were shocked by the departure of Navy dependents, issuance of a U.S. travel warning, and the threatened closure of the DOD Bahrain School, to which many senior Bahraini officials send their children and which counts Crown Prince Salman among its alumni.

2. (S) Several positive developments have occurred since then. The Bahrainis rearrested the six and continue to detain the four most dangerous of them. The State Department lifted the travel warning and DOD agreed to continue operating the Bahrain School, enabling it to open on time for the school year. The United States and Bahrain also signed a free trade agreement (FTA), the first with a Gulf state and only the third in the Arab world.

Deep U.S. Concern About Prosecuting Extremists

3. (S) There are, nonetheless, lingering concerns on both sides. We remain concerned about the status of the case against the four remaining detainees and we continue to urge the GOB to conduct a robust investigation and prosecution, which would send the right message on the GOB's commitment to combating terrorism. Bahrain is proud to host NAVCENT Headquarters, and is apprehensive that the continued departure of Navy dependents as well as regional and global force posture reviews may portend further changes in the Navy's profile in Bahrain.

4. (S) While Bahrain's people have not been immune to the waves of anti-Americanism present in the region - daily pictures in newspapers and on television have had an impact - the leadership has remained steadfast in its support for the United States and for its bilateral relationship with the USG. It has openly championed the FTA as the key to its economic future and continues to embrace the Navy as the key to its present and future security.

Objectives

5. (S) What we want from the visit:

-- Renewed commitment from the GOB, preferably directly from the King, that Bahrain will conduct a thorough investigation and prosecution of the four terrorism suspects and send the right message on counter-terrorism.

-- An indication of Bahrain's long range thinking on the U.S. Navy presence in country.

-- Continued Bahrain support, both politically and in practical terms, for our efforts in Iraq and Operation Enduring Freedom maritime operations.

Issues of Interest to Bahrain

6. (S) The Bahrainis will want to hear from you on:

-- A reaffirmation of the Navy's long-term commitment to Bahrain.

-- The path forward on Iraq.

-- Shaken by the events of last summer, Bahrain will welcome positive statements on its support for OIF and OEF.

-- Anything you can say about a return, even partial, of Navy dependents and your thoughts on the future of the Bahrain School.

Key Issues to Raise

17. (S) We suggest you raise the following key points:

-- Express appreciation for Bahrain's hospitality in serving as the venue for this event involving Ministers of Defense from the coalition in Iraq.

-- Recognize the long history of mil-mil cooperation with Bahrain, most notably through hosting NAVCENT.

-- Praise Bahrain's support for OEF, OIF, and U.S. policy in Iraq, including training for Iraqi financial specialists and firefighters.

-- Commend the King's steps on political and economic reform and his active participation in the G8 Broader Middle East and North Africa reform initiative. Note our concern that Bahrain keep to this path of reform.

-- Reaffirm the commitment of the U.S. Navy in Bahrain.

-- Stress our concern on counter-terrorism, noting that everything we want to do in Bahrain, from military cooperation to FTA, depends on close cooperation in this area. Successful prosecution of the remaining four detainees will improve the security situation on the ground and send the right signal to Al Qaida and the world that Bahrain will not tolerate any connection to terrorism on its soil.

Issues Background

Iraq

18. (S) Bahrain supports our goals and role in Iraq. They recognize the critical nature of stabilizing the security situation, holding elections and establishing a government that represents all of Iraq's communities, and preventing neighboring countries from meddling in Iraq's domestic situation. King Hamad told General Abizaid on September 27 that U.S. forces should plan to depart Iraq as soon as possible following the elections so that Iraq could develop its own leaders and not rely upon the United States to deal with its problems. In contrast, Crown Prince Salman and Defense Minister Al Khalifa asserted that the U.S. should remain in Iraq until the Iraqis are in a position to provide security themselves. All agreed that elections should be held without delay and identified Iran as the greatest long-term threat to Iraq's future.

19. (S) In addition to hosting NAVCENT, Bahrain deployed 35 tanks and 1,500 troops to Kuwait during OIF and flew air patrols over Kuwait and Bahrain. They also deployed their frigate the Al Sabha during both OIF and OEF. They are considering deploying patrol boats to the northern Arabian Gulf should they receive a formal request from the Interim Iraqi Government.

Foreign Military Financing

110. (S) Bahrain received \$24.85 million in FMF grants from the FY04 Department of State budget. This brings the FMF total over the past three fiscal years to \$145 million, including funding from the FY02 and FY03 supplementals. The Bahrainis have used these funds to purchase a TPS 59 radar (due to arrive late 2006), an infrared countermeasures suite for the King's new 747-400 (due in 12 months), the refurbishment of 14 Cobra helicopters, and multiple spare cases for all services. Due to the military's aging equipment and growing maintenance costs, the Bahrain Defense Force sees FMF as an important means to bridge their budget deficits and to sustain readiness.

Security

111. (S) All of Bahrain's leaders are adamantly determined to maintain security for Americans here. Whenever we make requests for extra security, the police respond immediately and appropriately. The GOB continues to hold the four most dangerous of the six terrorism suspects, and we are urging the government to conduct a robust investigation and prosecution. The Crown Prince has mentioned a number of times that the Minister of Interior, who was appointed during the spring, "gets" our concerns, but that capacity building at the Bahrain National Security Agency (BNSA) and Attorney General's office requires additional work. The GOB has committed to working with the USG to establish a

Counter-Terrorism Operations Center and a Counter-Terrorism Intelligence Center, though establishment of the latter is pending management changes at BNSA. Parliament will open its next session on October 9, the day of your visit, and it is expected to consider a draft counter-terrorism law during the 2004-05 session. The new law would apply stiff penalties for conspiracy to commit terrorist acts.

Democratic Reform

¶12. (S) The 2002 constitution established an elected lower house of parliament, the Council of Representatives, while the upper house, the Consultative Council, is appointed by the King. Due to the breakdown of the process of advancing legislation during the 2003-04 legislative session and calls for amendments to the constitution, the government and four opposition societies are engaged in a "constitutional dialogue" to resolve their differences.

¶13. (S) In late September, the GOB arrested human rights activist Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja following his comments at a forum on poverty in which he reportedly accused the Prime Minister of mismanaging the economy during his 30-plus years in office. Days later, the government closed the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, which organized the forum, accusing it of political activities that contravened the Societies Law and the Center's own charter. We have expressed our concern with this apparent step backward in the GOB's reform process.

Economy

¶14. (S) The United States and Bahrain signed a free trade agreement on September 14, marking a new level of commitment in our bilateral economic relationship. Bahrain is the first country in the Gulf region to have an FTA with us, and joins Jordan and Morocco as the only Arab states with FTAs. We hope to use the Bahrain FTA as a springboard to promote economic reform, openness, and transparency in the region, and as an important step in realizing the President's vision of a Middle East Free Trade Area by 2013. Bahrain will cite the FTA as the United States' endorsement of its economy and to market Bahrain as a regional center for finance, insurance, banking, business services, education, and health care.

Middle East Peace

¶15. (S) The Bahraini government is deeply troubled by the continuing violence in Israel and the Palestinian territories. Though far from the conflict, Bahrainis identify with the Palestinians. The Crown Prince has told us that he would like to work with the Israeli government, in particular in fending off threats from Iran, but he cannot do so in the absence of some sort of settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. The Crown Prince appreciates that the President has gone far to promote the establishment of a viable, independent Palestinian state, but he has asked that the Administration make a gesture to relieve the suffering of the Palestinian people. Flare-ups in violence in the territories inevitably transfer directly into heightened emotions among average Bahrainis.

ZIADDEH